Canadian Centre
For Foreign Policy
Development

Centre canadien
pour le développement
de la politique étrangère

ALBANIA AND KOSOVO: ROOTS OF INSTABILITY

Robert C. Austin

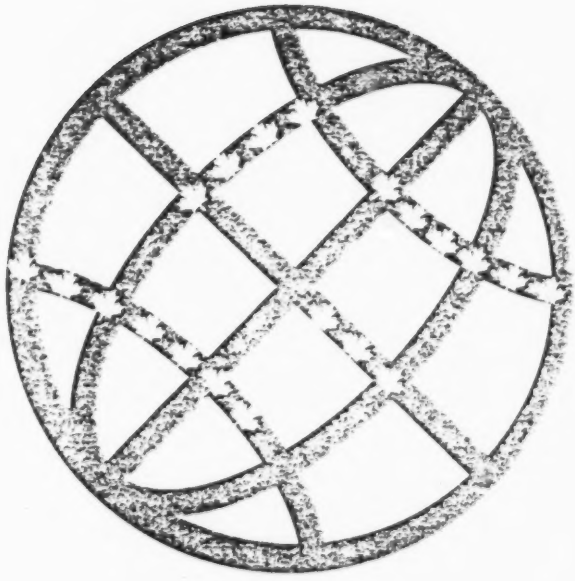
125 promenade Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2
Téléphone/Téléphone : 613 944 8278 Fax/Télécopieur : 613 944 0687
www.cfp-pec.gc.ca

Canadian Centre
For Foreign Policy
Development

Centre canadien
pour le développement
de la politique étrangère

ALBANIA AND KOSOVO: ROOTS OF INSTABILITY

Robert C. Austin



125 promenade Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2
Telephone/Téléphone : **613 944 8278** Fax/Télécopieur : **613 944 0687**
www.cfp-pec.gc.ca

103-06890

ALBANIA AND KOSOVO: ROOTS OF INSTABILITY

ROBERT C. AUSTIN*

Both Albania and Kosovo are extremely unstable at the moment. For Albania, stability in the long-term is a realistic possibility, but the prospects for stability in Kosovo in the foreseeable future are far less promising. Instability in either country directly affects the broader Balkan region. Along with its security concerns, Canada also has humanitarian and human rights interests in Albania and Kosovo.

The uprising of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo coupled with the Serbian military action there seriously affects developments inside Albania. However, as it has become clear during the course of the 21st century, the interests of the Albanian nation and the Albanian state rarely coincide.

ALBANIA

Background to Instability

Albania proclaimed independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912. During the ensuing three decades, Albania made limited progress economically and politically. By 1925, Albania had fallen into a stagnant form of authoritarianism. When the Communist Party (later re-named the Party of Labour) took control of Albania in 1944, it executed or imprisoned all voices of opposition. Two years later, the Communist Party introduced a Stalinist-style centrally-planned economy, nationalizing all industries, confiscating and redistributing land, and banning private property. In 1978, Albania's long time leader, Enver Hoxha, embraced autarky.

Albania was the last Communist country in Eastern Europe to embark on a path of economic and democratizing reform. On the eve of transition in 1990, Albania's economy was highly centralized and technologically backward with an abnormal concentration of heavy industry. Desperately needed food aid was being delivered by the international community. There was no political opposition and no independent organisations, and the judicial system was typical of communist states.

Albania had it first multi-party elections in March 1991. Deteriorating economic circumstances coupled with massive student demonstrations in December 1990 had forced the Communist government to allow the creation of opposition political parties. The elections were relatively free, but not entirely fair. The Albanian Communist Party of Labour, headed by Fatos Nano, won easily. But the economic catastrophe posed severe challenges to the new government and the newly formed independent trade unions went on strike. Between 1989 and 1992, GDP dropped fifty

* Robert Austin is Project Coordinator and lecturer with the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Toronto.

© Canadian Foreign Policy, ISSN 1192-6422, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Fall 1998), 61-72

percent due to a chain reaction of supply shortfalls which had paralyzed the entire economy. The country was at a virtual standstill. Thousands of refugees fled to Italy and Greece. Albania's emboldened opposition forces forced new elections in 1992. This time, the Democratic Party, led by Sali Berisha, won a resounding victory with 62 percent of the vote.

Between 1992 and 1996, under Berisha's leadership, Albania vigorously headed towards a market economy. Berisha legalized private ownership, privatized state-owned property and broke up the collective farm system. For four consecutive years, the country's GDP grew at a rate of 7 to 11 percent annually. Albania successfully reintegrated into the world community becoming a member of the Council of Europe, the OSCE and NATO's Partnership for Peace program.

Berisha was far less successful, however, in consolidating democracy, building a civil and tolerant society, and instituting the rule of law. Under President Berisha, Albania's government remained highly intolerant of opposition. Its political program focussed primarily on destroying the Socialist Party[1] using illegal means. The post-communist leaders continued their predecessors' pattern of jailing political foes. The deeply politicized courts convicted Socialist Party leader Fatos Nano in 1994.

In May 1996, for the third time in six years, the country went to the polls. Even though the Democratic Party probably would have won these elections honestly, it engaged in wide scale electoral fraud to ensure victory, fearing that in opposition it would be subjected to the same policy of retribution it had meted out to Socialist Party members. Following the elections, political power became concentrated in President Berisha's hands and Western support for the government dissipated. International human rights organisations complained of widespread human rights abuses, the press and other media were restricted, and massive political interference in the judiciary continued. Deep polarization between the country's two leading parties and elite political in-fighting in Tirana left the Albanian people isolated from the country's political process.

Pyramid schemes first appeared in 1993 and began to show their weakness in the fall of 1996. Noone in a position of authority—the government, media, or IMF—warned the Albanian people of the dangers of investing in them. To the contrary, each of the main political parties had its own pyramid scheme which it promoted. The press stuck to its party base and was unable to publish an independent assessment. Many people had invested everything they had and initially lived off the interest which was as high as 50 percent per month. When the pyramids collapsed in January and February 1997, more than half a million Albanians lost their savings and sole source of income. Eighty percent of the population had invested a total of $500 million dollars in them—half of the country's of GDP. The collapse of the pyramid schemes brought Albania's political and economic systems tumbling down.

Pyramid schemes first appeared in 1993 and began to show their weakness in the fall of 1996.

President Berisha seemed unable to react to the sudden economic crisis in the country and the intense polarization between the two main parties prevented them from working out an emergency plan. With no answer from Tirana as to how they would get their money back, citizens resorted to violence to provoke a response. First in the coastal city of Vlore, then in other communities,

1. The Communist Party of Labour changed its name to the Socialist Party in June 1991.

citizens looted weapons depots while the country's army and other internal security forces disintegrated. The subsequent level of destruction was staggering. Protesters burned government offices all across the south. Citizens destroyed everything: schools, libraries, historic monuments—nothing was left untouched. The country was in anarchy verging on civil war.

Many Albanians blamed President Berisha for the country's upheaval, believing that he had either benefitted personally from the pyramid schemes or should have warned the people of their dangers. The severity of the economic crisis destroyed President Berisha's government. Fearing a worsening of the Albanian instability, the international community forced new elections in May/June 1997. Socialist Party leader Fatos Nano, who had been recently freed from jail, won these elections and remained in power until September 1998. Faced with political squabbling within his five-party coalition and dissension in his own party, Nano resigned. He was replaced as Party leader by 30-year old Pandeli Majko, a former student leader during the uprising against Communist rule. This change over in the Socialist Party leadership was unconnected to the government's effectiveness, or ineffectiveness, in coping with the country's problems.

The central government never fully re-gained control over the entire country after the spring 1997 turmoil. In late summer 1998, there were two assassinations of political leaders and politically-inspired outbreaks of vandalism in the capital continued into the fall. Many towns, especially in the north, remain under control of armed criminal gangs.

Albania and Balkan Stability

Albania is a small country in population and geography, but its internal troubles reverberate beyond its borders. Civil unrest in Albania threatens to upset the already delicate balance in the Balkans as became abundantly clear in the wake of the breakdown of the state and accompanying armed rioting in 1997. Albania's internal upheaval affects broader Balkan stability through three main mechanisms. First, the lack of government control in Albania has undermined all efforts to round up illegal weapons and allows for them to be easily smuggled across borders—into Kosovo and Macedonia. Second, political and economic chaos in Albania creates displaced persons. In the wake of the spring 1997 turmoil, as many as 17,000 refugees from Albania crossed into Italy, 3,500 more into Greece, and yet more made their way to Western European countries. Finally, problems in the Albanian state fuel nationalists sentiments in neighbouring countries. As the Albanian government lost control in 1997, neighbouring Macedonia became more bellicose in dealing with its sizable Albanian minority; Greece initiated a more aggressive campaign on behalf of the 50,000 or so Greeks who live in southern Albania; and the Serbs in Kosovo cracked down on the Kosovar Albanian population. The problems created by the internationalization of Albania's internal troubles are much more difficult to resolve or manage than the original domestic issues.

Roots of Instability

The breakdown in Albania in 1997 was the result of political intolerance, citizen alienation from government and economic depression. Today, two additional factors—an armed population and the conflict in neighbouring Kosovo—wear away at Albania's stability.

Political Intolerance The underlying cause of political instability in Albania is a total lack of political tolerance in the country. Albania's twentieth century history is defined by a cycle of political vengeance. Over the past five years the two main political parties have engaged in backward-looking arguments and spent little time devising a realistic program for Albania's future.

The Democratic Party intensified the political polarization by focusing on destroying the Socialist Party through illegal means, including jailing party leader Fatos Nano in 1994. While in power, the Democratic Party waged an aggressive campaign against the unfriendly media. The pattern of political intolerance and retribution persists today, albeit not with the severity of the previous government. The Socialist Party purged all facets of government service, filling vacant positions with political allies. This creates a hostile opposition more eager to right alleged wrongs than to cooperate in the governance of the country.

Political Alienation The political battle between the Socialist Party and Democratic Party has involved only a very small circle of party elites and militants. In the face of a political elite that does not address the pressing economic problems of the people, the vast majority of Albanians have withdrawn from the political sphere. In this atmosphere, Albanians have lost their ability to vent grievances through legitimate means, including political institutions, responsive political parties, a fair electoral process, a free media and a vibrant civil society. The level of the widespread vandalism that accompanied the 1997 turmoil is a reflection of this lack of connection between the Albanian people and the state. If the government continues to spend more time addressing past wrongs than finding solutions to the country's pressing problems, citizens will remain alienated from the government and have no stake in political stability.

Poverty and Unemployment Poverty and a weak economy contribute significantly to the Albania's overall instability. Albania has long been Europe's poorest country. Albanians invested in the pyramid schemes because the banking system was inadequate and there were simply no other economic opportunities. The collapse of the pyramid schemes last year decimated the economy. The current state of Albania's economy is bleak: unemployment is estimated at 30 percent, and is especially high among Albania's youth; the newly-created private farms lack capital; key industrial sectors are closed due to a lack of capital for modernization; the government is unable to collect taxes; inflation was 42 percent in 1997; and there is a huge trade imbalance. Albania's economy is utterly dependent on cash sent home by the 500,000 or so Albanians working abroad, mostly in Greece. Unemployed youth with little hope of future employment are a destabilizing element within Albania. They do not see their future as laying within Albania and think that the only opportunity for advancement is to leave the country, not to contribute to it. Their hopelessness and frustration remain a destabilizing element within the country.

Availability of Weapons Since the summer of 1997, the Albanian government has been trying to recover the weapons stolen from military depots during the spring rioting. In August 1997, it granted a six-week amnesty for people in possession of illegal weapons to encourage citizens to turn them in, but at the end of the amnesty period on 30 September 1997, between 600,000 and 800,000 weapons remained in civilian hands. This abundance of high powered weaponry makes it difficult for the Albanian state to exert control over the entire country. Incidences involving gun warfare, rival gangs and illegal weapons erupted throughout 1997 and 1998. In February 1998, armed men seized Shkoder—the key city in Albania's northern region. As long as the population is armed, the spectre of anarchy will loom over Albania.

Kosovo Internal instability in Albania and armed conflict in neighbouring Kosovo have an unfortunate negatively, mutually-reinforcing relationship. The Albanian government will not willingly get entangled in the Kosovo crisis due to its political and economic problems at home and Albania's relative military weakness vis a vis Serbia. It is difficult, however, for the Albanian authorities to prevent the Kosovo crisis from spilling across borders. The lucrative market for arms in Kosovo and the Albanians' poverty makes the task of collecting weapons practically futile. These half million military arms not only affect Albania's stability, but also provide a steady reserve of weapons for the Kosovo fighters. The ongoing inflow of refugees from Kosovo is undermining the already difficult process of economic recovery. The Kosovo conflict strengthens the position of previously marginalized Albanian politicians who advocate non-political means to solve the Kosovo problem, however, all major political forces in Albania look to the international community to bring peace to Kosovo.

Looking Forward

Albania's future looks bleak. Episodes of armed uprisings, civil unrest, and even anarchy, are likely to continue. The domestic issues that contributed to the country's breakdown in 1997 have not been resolved, and in many ways have been exacerbated. If domestic issues are alleviated, Kosovo's destabilizing influence will become manageable.

Political stabilization requires, at minimum, improving political tolerance, enforcing the rule of law and due process. Albania's future stability and consolidation of democracy depend heavily on bridging the gap between the country's two main political parties. The current leadership of the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party is probably too entrenched in their attitudes to embark on a new path of political tolerance, dialogue and loyal opposition. The younger generation of leaders is more open to discussion. Dialogue between political opponents of this generation is needed now before they fall victim to entrenched positions of their elders.

The domestic issues that contributed to the country's breakdown in 1997 have not been resolved, and in many ways have been exacerbated.

Poverty and unemployment contribute significantly to Albania's internal instability. Albania needs international assistance programs focussed on micro-enterprise development to provide a foundation for economic growth. Until now, the capitalist revival in Albania has been focussed almost exclusively on "kioskism"—small private businesses. The Albanian embrace of small-scale capitalism has been unprecedented in the former Communist bloc, and while helpful in the short-run it will hardly provide the basis for long term economic stabilization. Training and education programs are needed to help farmers turn small plots of arable land into profitable small agricultural businesses. The establishment of an agricultural bank of credit would go a long way towards revitalizing what is Albania's most important sector.

Although Albania's major problems are in the north, relatively little international assistance is directed there. Assistance to Albania has generally been focussed on the capital, Tirana, with the hinterlands receiving scant attention. As a result, many of people from the north have moved to Tirana putting huge strains on its already dilapidated infrastructure. A concerted effort is required to provide economic and humanitarian assistance to the regions, particularly to the poor and troubled northeast region.

Perhaps the most immediate, troublesome issue is the easy availability of weapons. The collection of a large portion of these weapons is a necessary condition for stability and the re-assertion of state authority in Albania.

Despite the myriad of problems plaguing Albania, many simple, concrete measures can be undertaken today to diminish the likelihood of civil unrest in the future. Canada, as a neutral country that is highly respected by Albanians, is in an excellent position to play an important role in supporting a variety of stabilizing initiatives.

KOSOVO

Kosovo is a province of Serbia, the largest and most powerful of Yugoslavia's two remaining republics, and is about twice the size of Canada's Prince Edward Island. This landlocked, mountainous territory has sufficient minerals and other natural resources to make it a valued prize in an otherwise impoverished region. By the turn of the century, Albanians were already a majority in Kosovo and in the aftermath of the Second World War, their numerical superiority grew steadily due to a high birth rate, lower infant mortality and the out-migration of Serbs. Today, there are about 2.2 million Kosovars, of whom about ninety percent are ethnic Albanians, eight percent Serbian, and the remainder primarily Montenegrin. While Albania's implosion in 1997 took many by surprise, Kosovo's relative calm until early 1998 was equally surprising.

History of Ethnic Conflict

Between 1389 and 1912, the Kosovo territory was under direct rule of the Ottoman Empire. In 1912 during the First Balkan War, Albania declared independence and Kosovo became part of Serbia. From 1919 to 1939 Kosovo was contained in the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (re-named Yugoslavia in 1928). In 1945, Tito and the Communists founded a federal Yugoslavia in which Serbia was one of six republics and the Kosovo territory was simply a region of the Serb Republic.

Throughout the communist period, the Albanians in Kosovo sought equality with the other nations of federal Yugoslavia. Equality, in terms of granting the ethnic Albanians a republic, also would have included the right to secede—a concession no Yugoslav leader was willing to permit. For two decades Serbia maintained a tight grip on Kosovo. However, in 1966, Yugoslavia granted Kosovo self-rule within Serbia. This did not satisfy the Albanians as the Yugoslav government continued to strictly control all expressions of Albanian nationhood. Mass student demonstrations in 1968 were quickly and brutally repressed. In 1974, a new Yugoslav constitution granted Kosovo the status of an "autonomous province"—a constituent part of Yugoslavia and a de facto republic. Nonetheless, Albanians continued to demand their own republic within Yugoslavia. Albanian university student protests in early 1981 were severely crushed and led to bloody riots throughout Kosovo.

In 1989, Slobodan Milosevic became President of Serbia. He shaped his entire political agenda around undoing the legacies of the 1974 constitution. The Serb's explicit objective was now to eliminate public evidence of the Albanian nation and to reestablish Serb authority and national presence in Kosovo. In July 1990, the Serb government formally revoked Kosovo's status as an autonomous province and dissolved Kosovo's government. The Serbs instituted an apartheid-like system to control the majority Albanian population; it abolished Kosovo's Albanian political, educational and cultural institutions. The new Serbian language only policy in the schools and

universities resulted in a mass exodus of children from the official school system. A new quota system at the University of Pristina guaranteed a disproportionately high number of places for Serb and Montenegrin students.

The reassertion of Serb nationhood and authority in Kosovo was accompanied by widespread human rights violations. The 55,000 strong Serb police force eliminated any perceived expression of Albanian nationalism. Between 1981 and 1991, about 60,000 Serbs and Montenegrins fled the ethnic turmoil in Kosovo.

The Albanian Kosovars responded to the loss of their institutions by building a parallel society within Kosovo, but completely outside Serbian jurisdiction. In 1991, Kosovo leaders declared the region a sovereign and independent state. The decision was overwhelmingly approved in a regional referendum. The following year, Kosovar Albanians elected a shadow parliament, president and prime minister which then created a parallel state system and state structures for taxation, health, education and elections by Albanians for Albanians.

The reassertion of Serb nationhood and authority in Kosovo was accompanied by widespread human rights violations.

Under the political and moral leadership of Ibrahim Rugova, leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo and President of Kosovo's shadow government, Albanians employed a strategy of passive resistance to achieve their objectives. But over the course of five years this strategy did not result in any substantive steps forward towards greater autonomy or diminished repression. When the 1995 Dayton peace accords failed to include a settlement on Kosovo, Rugova began to lose ground to more militant voices. A year later, the Kosovo shadow government leaders admitted that passive resistance had failed and called for active resistance through peaceful civil disobedience.

In 1996, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) emerged with separatist ambitions and terrorist tactics, attacking Serbian authorities, in particular the police force. It has one demand—the complete independence of Kosovo. What started out as an ad hoc band of guerrillas grew in strength as Serbian repression intensified.

In late 1997, KLA attacks and Serb police brutality escalated; the situation became increasingly out of control in 1998. Serbia moved armoured units and Interior Ministry troops to the perimeter of the province. On March 2, a clash between ethnic Albanians and paramilitary Serbian troops in a small village left more than 20 people dead. Tens of thousands of ethnic Albanians rallied in Pristina in peaceful protest. Then on March 10, about 1,000 heavily armed Serb police and special armed forces launched a three-day assault on the village of Donji Prekaz, leaving at least 45 dead. This time between 60,000 and 100,000 people gathered in Pristina, a city of 200,000, to demonstrate against the violence.

For eight months, Serb special forces and the Yugoslav Army systematically destroyed KLA strongholds, using tanks, aircraft and scorched earth tactics in village after village. The Serb political leaders consistently maintained they were merely responding to the threat of a well-armed terrorist group. In September 1998, the Serb parliament announced publicly that its Kosovo operation had been successful and was ending, but only days later, the international community learned of new massacres.

In February 1998, the KLA had been an almost insignificant presence in Kosovo, but brutish Serbian actions in the countryside drew thousands of young volunteers to its ranks. By the summer, the KLA controlled as much as half of Kosovo's territory. Today, the KLA has a political wing which expects to be a player in any negotiations on Kosovo's final status.

Spillover from Kosovo

Macedonia and Albania are politically and economically vulnerable to spillover effects from the Kosovo crisis. Both countries are being drawn into the conflict through the cross-border transit of weapons, guerrillas and refugees.

Macedonia already has a huge and restive Albanian minority numbering between 20 and 40 percent of its population of two million. Albanians form a majority in Western Macedonia which borders both Albania and Kosovo. Although the Albanians are better off in Macedonia than in Kosovo, many problems remain unresolved, especially regarding the status of the Albanian minority within Macedonia's constitutional framework. Albanians in Macedonia have limited rights in terms of using their own language and national symbols and there are recurring charges of ethnic discrimination by the Macedonian government. Albanian political parties in Macedonia are seeking greater political and national rights for the Albanian minority.

Since the fall of 1997 tensions between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians have risen with several incidents of violent clashes between Albanians and police. In September, the Albanian mayor of Gostivar, where Albanians make up 75 percent of the population, was convicted of spreading ethnic intolerance because he allowed the Albanian flag to fly above city hall. In reaction to the massacre in the Kosovo village of Donji Prekaz on 10 March 1998, tens of thousands of Albanians rallied in Albanian-populated towns in Macedonia in solidarity with Kosovar Albanians and in opposition to Serbia. The demonstrators waved Albanian flags and sang the Albanian national anthem.

The influx of Albanian refugees from Kosovo is creating political tensions in Macedonia and crippling its struggling economy. The ethnic Albanians arriving from Kosovo are, on the whole, more militantly, nationalist-oriented than Macedonia's own ethnic Albanian population. The Kosovo conflict is bringing a flow of arms into Macedonia both from Albania on their way to Kosovo and from Kosovo into the hands of Kosovars guerrillas and their supporters based in Macedonia.

Albania As with Macedonia, the conflict in Kosovo threatens Albania's security and its political and economic stability. The armed conflict in Kosovo undermines efforts in Albania to collect the weapons held by civilians. Albanians have new monetary and nationalist incentives for holding on to the weapons looted in 1997 in order to sell them to Albanian "liberation fighters" in Kosovo. The Kosovo civil conflict is already being brought into Albania not only by increased cross-border gun smuggling, but also by the transit of guerrillas.

If the cross-border smuggling of arms and rebels continues or if the Kosovar guerrillas use the Albanian soil to stage attacks within Kosovo, Yugoslavia may feel compelled to intervene directly in Albania. On several occasions, the Yugoslav military and police forces have massed near the Albanian border and Yugoslav helicopters have flown near the Albanian borders.

The unrest in Kosovo directly affects Albania's democratization process. Until now, the hard-core nationalists in Tirana who call for the unification of Albanian lands have been marginalised and Tirana's policy has been one of restraint. Continued repression in Kosovo will bring to the

foreground Albanian politicians seeking to solve the problem by non-political means. Moreover, as in Serbia, Albanian leaders might use the Kosovo conflict to deflect attention away from thorny domestic problems.

A mass influx of refugees into Albania will strain the already difficult process of recovery from last year's complete economic breakdown. Increased economic difficulties, in turn, will put additional pressure on the Albanian government and political system.

Causes of the Kosovo Conflict

The decades of instability and ethnic conflict in Kosovo are a large consequence of: (1) Kosovo's ambiguous political status; (2) persistent repression of ethnic Albanians; and (3) absence of economic opportunity in Kosovo.

The political status is not only contested, but ambiguous. Both the Serb and Albanian nations have reasonable political claims to the territory. Serbia has a strong historical right to the land on the grounds that Kosovo has been an integral part of Serbia since the end of Ottoman rule in Kosovo in 1912. Moreover, Kosovo is the cradle of Serb nationhood. Serbs view Kosovo as an integral part of Serbia and the Albanians there not as a majority in Kosovo, but as a minority within Serbia.

Kosovar Albanians claim the right of national self-determination by virtue of their majority status within the region. In an unfortunate twist of historical fate, Kosovo is not only the birthplace of Serb nationhood, but also birthplace of the Albanian national awakening in the 19th century. Kosovar Albanians have always believed that they deserve equality with the other nations of federal Yugoslavia, which in political terms, has meant having their own republic.

... Kosovo is not only the birthplace of Serb nationhood, but also birthplace of the Albanian national awakening in the 19th century.

A second factor underlying decades of ethnic conflict in Kosovo is the persistent repression of ethnic Albanians by Serb authorities. The Albanian demand for greater autonomy or independence has risen and fallen in step with the increase and decrease in violations of their basic human and political rights. The persistent mass killings and indiscriminate destruction of much of Kosovo by Serb forces throughout 1998 has eroded the Albanian people's willingness to trust any political settlement within Serbia, and garnered support for the militants who call for full independence and employ terrorist tactics.

The absence of economic opportunity is the third main factor contributing to instability in Kosovo. Unemployment among Albanians is as high as 80 to 90 percent. Unemployment of the educated youth is a particularly troublesome problem (Thirty percent of the population are students.) Even without Serb repression or ethnic conflict, this region would be ripe for upheaval.

It should be noted that the sudden escalation of violence in March 1998 may not be solely attributable to Serbia's need to eliminate the KLA's terrorist activities. Yugoslav President Milosevic may also want the conflict in order to divert his public's attention away from the collapsing Yugoslav economy and growing discontent in Montenegro. A crackdown against Albanians in Kosovo unites Serbs. Milosevic is skilled at manipulating Serb nationalist feelings to serve his agenda.

Canada's Interests and Policy Options

With evidence of new massacres in September 1998, Canada and the international community is feeling compelled to take action to protect ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Under the periodic massacre, is a foundation of systematic violation of political and human rights of ethnic Albanians by Serb police and an apartheid-like system. Kosovo's humanitarian needs are acute with as many as 500,000 refugees and internally displaced persons requiring food, shelter and medical care. Kosovo's armed conflict with Serbia threatens to undermine our enormous investments in Balkan stability, particularly in Bosnia.

Resolution of Human Rights Issues in Kosovo The Kosovo crisis is first and foremost a human rights problem. Had basic human rights and democratic rights been observed in Kosovo, it is highly unlikely that the Albanian desire for Kosovo independence or greater autonomy would have erupted into violent terrorist attacks. If Serbia continues its policy of repression and brutality towards the Kosovar Albanians, more and more Albanians will demand independence and support violence as a necessary means for national and self-preservation. Conversely, if the political and human rights of Albanians are respected, support for KLA demands and tactics will diminish. Before any progress can be made in resolving Kosovo's political status, the basic human rights and democratic rights of the Albanian community must be ensured.

Albanians and Serbs may be able to find common ground in guaranteeing the rights of all citizens in Kosovo. If terrorist attacks against Kosovar Serbs and police by the KLA stopped and the KLA were disarmed, Milosevic could claim victory in the eyes of his constituents. Ibrahim Rugova, president of the Kosovo shadow government and well-respected pacifist, could very well support an end to Serb brutality and a restoration of civil rights and Albanian educational and cultural institutions as existed prior to 1989 without insisting upon a formal change in Kosovo 's political status.

What specifically can the international community do to improve respect for human rights and democratic rights in Kosovo? As a first step, the situation needs to be monitored by impartial bodies such as the European Union and UN Commission on Human Rights, both of which have expressed an interest in establishing offices in Pristina. An increased field presence by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) would also be welcome. As well as monitoring the human and political rights situation, these international bodies could monitor the implementation of any new agreements, including the recently signed education accord.

The United Nations' War Crimes Tribunal with jurisdiction over the Balkan region is to investigate whether war crimes have been committed by Serbs. The United States has contributed more than one million dollars for the tribunal. While this effort is important given the atrocities committed, it should not become a focal point or centre piece of Western reaction to the Kosovo conflict. A war crimes tribunal may serve justice and mete out punishment, but it will not end Kosovo's long-standing human rights problems.

The international community should undertake the monitoring and protection of human rights in Kosovo in such a way as to emphasize that both Serbs and Albanians will be protected and with the intent of getting formal agreements on issues of human rights between the Albanian leaders and Milosevic. The international bodies should be clear that they are there to protect the political and human rights of all citizens of Kosovo regardless of ethnicity. Progress may be made incrementally on a variety of mutually beneficial human rights issues that develop a pattern of cooperation and agreement.

Containment of the Kosovo Conflict To contain the Kosovo conflict, the primary task is to stem the cross-border flows of weapons, guerrillas and refugees. Neither Albania nor Macedonia has the resources to do this themselves. An international peacekeeping force is required with the authority to detain persons and to confiscate illegal weapons. In March 1998, the OSCE stepped up its presence along Kosovo's borders with Albania and Macedonia, but the OSCE's mandate is limited to monitoring and reporting violations.

The danger of the Kosovo conflict spilling beyond its borders could be significantly reduced if the United Nations "Prevention Diplomacy" force that is already in Macedonia were strengthened and a similar United Nations peacekeeping mission were created for the Albania- Kosovo border. These UN troops need to have the right to turn back refugees and individuals with weapons and/or the right to confiscate weapons.

If the international community takes action to prevent refugees from fleeing Kosovo, then, for humanitarian reasons, it should implement a complementary program for ensuring the basic needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Kosovo, of whom there are an estimated 24 000 at this time. There are a number of international organisations already working with IDPs in Kosovo whose knowledge and skills could easily be augmented.

As well as preventing the cross-border transit of arms within the region, it is wise to prevent an infusion of new weaponry into the region. The UN Security Council has implemented an arms embargo on the FRY and on 31 March, the European Union enacted its own arms embargo. In so far as these efforts have been characterized as sanctions against Yugoslavia to pressure it into political negotiations with Kosovo, they may prove counter-productive. If instead these efforts are characterized as measures to protect both Serbs and Albanians, their counter-productive potential may be neutralized.

Resolution of Kosovo's Political Status Until the fall of 1998 when human rights issues came to the fore, nearly all parties in the Balkan region and international community were treating the Kosovo conflict as a question of political status: Should Kosovo remain a region of the Serbian Republic within Yugoslavia, regain its status as an autonomous province within Serbia, become a republic within Yugoslavia, or achieve independence as its own state?

The international community is virtually unanimous in its support for greater autonomy for Kosovo within the Yugoslav federation, while categorically opposing independence. This is the view of the European Union, the United Nations Security Council and the six-nation Contact Group–comprising the United States, Russia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy. The United States, both unilaterally and as a member of the Contact Group, is the strongest advocate of pushing Yugoslav President Milosevic and Kosovar Albanian leaders into negotiations to find a political resolution to the Kosovo issue. As US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said with reference to the Contact Group's imposition of new sanctions on Yugoslavia: "The purpose of these measures should not be to return Kosovo to the status quo of last month or last year...Belgrade must enter into a real dialogue on an enhanced status for Kosovo."

Despite an international consensus, autonomy for Kosovo within federal Yugoslavia is not an acceptable option to the Kosovar Albanians. They have been down that road before with few gains to show for it. Milosevic wants to restore Serb control within Kosovo and today, most certainly will not meet the demands of Albanian terrorists. Milosevic's Kosovo policies have the full support of the Serb people who get their news from government-controlled, anti-Albanian media. As mentioned earlier, Milosevic may want the conflict to divert Serbians' attention away from growing economic problems. If NATO actually engages in airstrikes against Serb forces to "encourage" them to stop their offensive against ethnic Albanians or if the threat of airstrikes becomes credible, Milosevic may offer some concessions to Kosovo. In the summer of 1998, Milosevic said he was willing to negotiate with the Albanians with a view to the restoration of a kind of autonomy and a promise to re-visit the issue of Kosovo's political status in three years time.

Many Albanians are highly unlikely to accept willingly any solution that leaves them under the control of Serbs, either in Serbia or Yugoslavia. Neither pacifist President Rugova nor the political wing of the KLA see a solution within Serbian or Yugoslav jurisdiction. The options of enhanced autonomy and republic status that were viewed positively only a few years ago, are no longer acceptable. Even if the international community could pressure the Albanian leaders into backing down, it is not clear that the Albanian militants could be made to abide by such a decision or to cease terrorist activities undertaken in the name of independence.

Can the international community bring the parties to the negotiating table and force an enduring political solution? The international community may be able to entice the Albanian leaders to settle for autonomy by promising to become more involved in Kosovo, helping develop the economy, and closely monitoring human rights and Kosovo's elections. Should the KLA forces be eliminated by the Serb/Yugoslav offensive, ethnic Albanians may have no choice but to accept a solution imposed on them.

...autonomy for Kosovo within federal Yugoslavia is not an acceptable option to the Kosovar Albanians.

The issue of Kosovo's political status cannot be resolve today or in the near future. The positions of the two sides are diametrically opposed and unyielding. In insisting upon a political solution and greater autonomy for Kosovo, the US and the international community are, at best, wasting their time and resources, and at worst, exacerbating an already explosive situation and, possibly, neglecting consideration of feasible moderating options. Despite the tendency to make comparisons with Bosnia, the situation in Kosovo is fundamentally different. While Bosnia had a tradition of ethnic tolerance among its three ethnic groups, Albanians and Serbs have experienced little peaceful coexistence in Kosovo.

It may be wise to set aside the question of Kosovo's political status for the moment. This strategy would provide time for passions to cool and progress to be made incrementally on a variety of less contentious issues, thereby opening up the possibility of a future settlement where one does not exist today. This is the strategy that Alexander Lebed successfully employed in 1996 to end the bitter war in Chechnya and one that Milosevic has expressed some support for with a 3-year time frame.

Whatever solutions are implemented in the coming months to protect human rights in Kosovo, in the long run only equality for the ethnic Albanians within the Yugoslav Federation offers any prospect for sustained peace between Serbs and Albanians.